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THE ETERNAL SPIRIT AS THE SUPERIOR HYSSOP IN
HEBREWS 9:14

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THE ETERNAL SPIRIT AS THE SUPERIOR HYSSOP IN
HEBREWS 9:14

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Soli Deo Gloria

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 9:14 is one of the most theologically significant texts in the Letter to the Hebrews and in all of the New Testament. The theologian John Owen claimed, “that Christ should thus offer himself unto God, and that by the eternal Spirit, is the centre of the mystery of the gospel.”¹ The superiority of Christ’s sacerdotal function in Hebrews 9:11-14, “(arguably) expresses the central thought of the Epistle to the Hebrews.”² Indeed, the structure of the letter “evinces a concentric fabric, with 9:11-14 forming the governing concept of the document.”³ Thus, Hebrews 9:14 is theologically and thematically significant to both Hebrews and New Testament scholarship.

But despite the eminent importance of Hebrews 9:14, scholarly controversy persists with respect to its NT Hapax *πνεύματος αἰωνίου*. What precisely does the author of Hebrews refer to when he states that [Χριστὸς]... διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ? Does this phrase denote Jesus’ human spirit which attained immortality at his resurrection? Does this indicate the divine nature, which mysteriously supported the sacrifice of Christ’s human nature as an altar upholds a sacrifice? Or does this describe the Holy Spirit?

It is the contention of this paper that the New Testament hapax *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in Hebrews 9:14 denotes the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this phrase describes the

¹ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburg: Johnstone & Hunter, 1844-55), 307.

² Martin Emmerich, “Amtscharisma: Through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14),” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12.1 (2002): 17.

³ Emmerich, “Amtscharisma,” 17. See also Albert S. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Piazza della Pilotta, 1989).

Spirit's instrumental function as the applicator of the blood of Christ. The grammatical juxtaposition of *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in 9:14, with “sprinkling” (*ῥαντίζουσα*) in 9:13, suggests that the Holy Spirit acts as the “superior hyssop branch” through which Christ offers his sacrifice to God. Furthermore, *προσήνεγκεν* is employed to describe Christ's priestly “offering” in the heavenly Holy of Holies, which the author understood to be offered via a hyssop branch. Therefore, the prepositional phrase *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* which modifies *προσήνεγκεν*, naturally describes the Holy Spirit as the sacerdotal “instrument” through which Christ presents the benefits of his self-sacrifice to the Father.

Three Major Views of the Eternal Spirit

Although most scholars contend that *πνεύματος αἰωνίου* refers to the Holy Spirit, biblical interpreters throughout history have suggested that this refers to Jesus Christ's human spirit or to Christ's divine nature. Both of these views will be briefly considered, challenged, and then evaluated in light of Hebrews usage of *πνεύμα*.

Jesus' Human Spirit View

The first view to be analyzed is that of Jesus' human spirit. According to this perspective, the author of Hebrews utilizes *πνεύμα* similarly to a minority interpretation of John 4:24 in which true worshippers worship God “in spirit and in truth.”⁴ In other words, worship according to “the spirit” is worship according to the truest part of oneself. According to Harold W. Attridge on Hebrews 9:14,

Although it would be anachronistic to find here a developed “two-nature” christology, the spirit here most likely refers to Christ and to the interior or spiritual quality of his sacrificial act. Christ's self-offering was thus made with that portion of his being that was most truly himself.⁵

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 224-226. According to Carson, although there are a few who have taken *πνεύμα* to mean one's human spirit in John 4:24, the majority of scholarship views *πνεύμα* as a reference to the Holy Spirit in John 4:24. Especially in light of the proximate John 3:5-8, in which *πνεύμα* is clearly depicted as the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is most likely in view.

⁵ H. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 250.

According to Attridge, the psychological connotations of *πνεῦμα* are present, and emphasize that Christ's sacrifice was performed in accordance with the most fundamental component of his human nature. Indeed, 9:14 refers to Christ's internal disposition in his self-sacrifice.⁶ Jesus offered himself without reserve to God.⁷ Christ's self-sacrifice was a volitional and earnest action, performed according to the inner resolve of his human spirit to cleanse his people from their defiled consciences.

Moreover, Attridge proceeds to deny the plausibility of *πνεῦμα* as a reference to the Holy Spirit. He argues that a reference to the Holy Spirit is unsupportable, on the basis that the Author of Hebrew's usage of *πνεῦμα* is varied. He contends that

Trinitarian speculation, advocated by patristic and some modern interpreters, is not involved. Hebrews' references to the spirit are too diffuse and ill-focused to support a Trinitarian theology in this context.⁸

Thus, *πνεῦμα* cannot be a reference to the third member of the Trinity, since Hebrews' usage of *πνεῦμα* lacks any consistent meaning throughout Hebrews.

Furthermore, when Attridge argues that the meaning of *πνεῦμα* in Hebrews is "too diffuse and ill-focused to support a trinitarian theology..." and therefore a reference to the Holy Spirit is uncertain, he unintentionally undermines his own view, and indeed all three views. If the meaning of *πνεῦμα* is truly "too diffuse and ill-focused" to mean "the Holy Spirit," when the Holy Spirit is the clear referent of at least half of its occurrences, how much less certain can one adopt the "human spirit" view or the "divine nature" view. Based on statistical probability alone, if *πνεῦμα* cannot *certainly* refer to the Holy Spirit, can much less certainly refer to Christ's human spirit or divine nature.

Moreover, the "human spirit" view should be rejected, since it does not

⁶ Joseph Bonsirven, *Saint Paul: l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Verbum Salutis, 1943), 391.

⁷ B. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: MacMillan, 1903), 261-62; P. Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 358-360.

⁸ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 250.

satisfactorily account for the genitive modifier *αἰωνίου*. The spirit referred to here is “eternal”, which makes it difficult to perceive how Jesus’ temporal human spirit might be in the Author’s view. In this instance, Attridge claims that *αἰωνίου* refers to “the power of indestructible life” of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood, as explicated in Hebrews 7:16.⁹ Likewise, William L. Lane argues that this indestructible life “designates the eternity of the new priest from the perspective of his postresurrection existence,” indeed, “[it] offers a striking definition of the meaning of the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, “forever,” in Psalm 110:4 [LXX]...”¹⁰ But contra Attridge and Lane, Hebrews 9:14 does not evidently refer to Christ’s postresurrection existence, since his pre-resurrection self-sacrifice is in view. Furthermore, the genitive *αἰωνίου* simply functions attributively with *πνεῦμα*. Suggesting that during Christ’s self-sacrifice, this “spirit” was already considered “eternal” by the author. Therefore, since Christ’s human spirit was not in any respect “*αἰωνίου*” at the time of his self-offering, *πνεῦμα* must refer to either the divine nature or the Holy Spirit in 9:14.

Christ’s Divine Nature View

The second view to be analyzed is that of John Owen, who perceives the referent of “the eternal Spirit” to be the divine nature of Christ. In this perspective, the divine nature was the altar upon which Christ was sacrificed and upheld to bear the wrath of God. Christ’s divine nature buttressed his human nature, such that he was able to support the blow of the Father’s wrath upon himself on the cross. According to John Owen,

This is the second thing wherein the apostle opposeth the offering of Christ unto the offerings of the priests under the law: (1.) They offered bulls and goats; he offered himself. (2.) They offered by a material altar and fire; he by the eternal Spirit. That

⁹ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 250.

¹⁰ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 184.

Christ should thus offer himself unto God, and that by the eternal Spirit, is the centre of the mystery of the gospel. All attempts to corrupt, to pervert this glorious truth, are designs against the glory of God and faith of the church...”¹¹

In this way, the divine nature of Christ acts as the altar upon which the Son sacrifices himself, with respect to his human nature. The altar of Christ’s divinity mysteriously “upheld” his self-sacrifice, in order to bear the force of the wrath of the Father. The dignity of the Son as God is what upheld the Son as Man to “support” his self-offering. Owen explicates this further, saying,

The design of the apostle is to prove the efficacy of the offering of Christ above those of the priests under the law. Now this arose from hence, partly that he offered himself, whereas they offered only the blood of bulls and goats; but principally from the dignity of his person in his offering, in that he offered himself by his own eternal Spirit, or divine nature.¹²

Thus, there was a “moral quality in the blood of Christ not in that of other sacrifices.”¹³ Similarly, Hughes notes that “atonement must be secured by someone who is both human and divine for the sacrifice rendered to be efficacious.”¹⁴

In support of this perspective, according to Owen, is both the external and internal textual evidence:

The most, and most ancient copies of the original, read, “by the eternal Spirit;” and are followed by the Syriac, with all the Greek scholiasts. Now, although the Holy Spirit be also an eternal Spirit, in the unity of the same divine nature with the Father and the Son, yet where he is spoken of with respect unto his own personal actings, he is constantly called “the Holy Spirit,” and not as here, “the eternal Spirit.”¹⁵

Thus, since the “Eternal Spirit” is an idiosyncratic locution, it must mean something apart from the common personal referent to the “Holy Spirit”. Because this phrase is distinct from all other references to the Holy Spirit, it must refer uniquely to the

¹¹ Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 307.

¹² Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 306.

¹³ Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in Hebrews and James*, 84.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 359, quoted in Thomas, R. Schreiner, *Hebrews: Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 271.

¹⁵ Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 305-306.

divine nature.

But against John Owen's interpretation is that a reference to an altar is nowhere found in Hebrews 9:13-14. Rather 9:13a references the sacerdotal "sprinkling," which occurred *after* the slaughter of the bull and goat atonement sacrifices. This smattering of the blood occurred as the high priest brought the blood of these sacrifices into to the earthly tabernacle on Yom Kippur, and sprinkled them before and around the mercy seat (Lev 16). 9:13b also refers to the "sprinkling" of the ashes of the red heifer for the cleansing of the defiled (Num 19). Thus, given the immediate context, it is unlikely that the Author of Hebrews perceives the divine nature as an "altar." Although the "Eternal Spirit" is a unique phrase, it does not likely denote a reference to an altar, and thus it does not likely describe the divine nature.

The Holy Spirit View

The third view is that *πνεύματος αἰωνίου* refers to the Holy Spirit. Although some have contended for the "human spirit" or "divine nature" views of *πνεύματος αἰωνίου*, most scholars assert that this phrase naturally refers to the Holy Spirit. Throughout the book of Hebrews, *πνεῦμα* occurs twelve times. Apart from the enigmatic 9:14, the remaining eleven uses occur: once with regard to the human spirit (4:12), four times with respect to angelic spirits (1:7, 14; 12:9, 23), and six times with obvious reference to the Holy Spirit (2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15, 29). Thus, "most of the references to the Spirit in Hebrews clearly refer to the Holy Spirit."¹⁶ Indeed, "the author by adding the word "his" would have made clear that Jesus' human spirit is intended, and its omission suggests a reference to the Holy Spirit."¹⁷ In light of the Author's usage of *πνεῦμα*, a reference to Christ's human spirit in 9:14 is statistically improbable, and a

¹⁶ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 270.

¹⁷ D. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews: An Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 120, cited in Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 270.

reference to the divine nature is unfounded. The “Holy Spirit” view is the most natural and plausible interpretation of *πνεύματος αἰωνίου*. Thus, since the “Holy Spirit” view reflects the best attestation to the Author’s use of *πνεῦμα*, “Christ’s human spirit” and the “divine nature” views must be rejected.

But although *πνεύματος αἰωνίου* most likely refers to the third person of the trinity, what explanatory power does this perspective deliver? What does this phrase mean *actually*? What exactly was the Holy Spirit’s role in the self-offering of Christ? What does it mean that Christ offered himself *through* (*διὰ*) the Holy Spirit? Scholars who maintain the “Holy Spirit” view differ in their explanation of this pneumatological function. Some suggest a pneumatological enablement at work in Christ’s self-offering, as in the Lukan theme of the Spirit’s empowerment of Christ’s ministry?¹⁸ Another suggests that this refers to the Spirit as the “insignia” of the high priestly office.¹⁹ Still a more obscure view perceives the Spirit as the “eternal fire” upon a metaphorical altar, through which the “burnt offering” of Christ was sacrificed.²⁰

It is the perspective of this paper that *διὰ* does not describe the empowering *agency* of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s self-offering, nor the insignia of the high priestly office, nor the *means* of sacrifice by “eternal fire,” but rather *διὰ* describes the *instrumentality* of the Spirit as the applicator of the blood of Christ. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the superior sacerdotal “instrument” through which Christ presents the benefits of his self-sacrifice to the Father.

The grammatical juxtaposition of Hebrews 9:14 with Hebrews 9:13 is notable.

¹⁸ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 271. Here, Schreiner argues that “such a notion fits with the Lukan conception of the Spirit’s work in the life of Jesus, where his ministry was empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:1; 14, 18; 10:21).” See also Charles A. Trentham, *Hebrews-Revelation: The Broadman Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 67.

¹⁹ Emmerich, *Amstcharisma*, 17.

²⁰ Emmerich, *Amstcharisma*, 18. Emmerich notes that John Chrysostom promulgates this obscure view, alongside Albert Vanhoye, “Esprit éternel et feu du sacrifice en He 9, 14,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 263-74.

The red heifer ritual, cited in Hebrews 9:13, consisted of a priest sprinkling the ashes of a heifer upon defiled persons via a hyssop branch. And the self-offering of Christ, cited in Hebrews 9:14, is the self-offering of Christ (Hebrews 9:14), which was performed through the instrument of hyssop, the Holy Spirit functions as the superior “hyssop branch,” which applies the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ to defiled persons. When Christ offered himself on the cross, this offering consisted of a “sprinkling” *through* which it was offered to God. Thus, *διὰ* describes the Spirit’s *instrumental* function as the one carrying and applying the cleansing substance of Christ’s self-sacrifice. The Holy Spirit is the supreme sacerdotal instrument of not only cleansing, but also offering.

To demonstrate that the Holy Spirit functions as the supreme sacerdotal instrument of offering, a thorough textual and contextual analysis of Hebrews 9:13-14 is necessary. An investigation into the exegetical viability of this perspective is essential to proving this perspective’s explanatory value.

CHAPTER 2
TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Textual Considerations

Manuscript Witnesses

In order to thoroughly demonstrate the meaning of Hebrews 9:14, it is first necessary to establish the most reliable reading. The criteria for reliability is as follows: 1) the original reading will most likely be the earliest reading, 2) will most likely follow the earliest manuscript traditions, 3) and will most likely be the more difficult reading to the scribe.²¹

Manuscript attestation to *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in Hebrews 9:14 is accounted for in the earliest extant uncials and papyri. Codex Sinaiticus, which contains the entirety of the New Testament from the fourth century, and P46, which contains sections from Hebrews and the Pauline corpus from the early third century, represents the earliest known attestations to the autograph. In addition, the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus, the fourth century Codex Vaticanus, and the ninth century Codex Angelicus also attest to this reading. Each of these manuscripts are of the earliest text-type – that is the Alexandrian tradition – and are thus among the most reliable textual evidence. Indeed, “most scholars... are still inclined to regard the Alexandrian text as on the whole the best ancient recension and the one most nearly approximating the original.”²²

²¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 300-313.

²² Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 300-313.

Attestation to the alternative reading, *διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου* is only accounted for among late uncials. A seventh century uncial of the Alexandrian text-type, a sixth century Greek/Latin uncial of the Western text-type, and the ninth century codex Porphyrianus of the Byzantine text-type are the only attestations to this alternative reading. Because these are late manuscripts, and because two of these three attestations to this reading arise from the less reliable Western and Byzantine manuscript traditions, external evidence points to *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* as the most reliable reading.²³ Thus, in view of overwhelming external evidence, *διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου* must be rejected.

Furthermore, the internal evidence indicates the same, as the most difficult reading is certainly *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου*. That later manuscripts alone preserve this reading as probable evidence of the emendation of (a) copyist(s) who sought to correct the original reading to an easier rendering.²⁴ The word *αἰωνίος* is never used elsewhere in conjunction with *πνεύμα* in the New Testament to describe the Holy Spirit, and thus an emendation to the common *πνεύματος ἁγίου* clears away any difficulty to comprehending the referent of this verse as the Holy Spirit. In this way, *αἰωνίος* proves a more difficult reading to copyists than *ἁγίος*, and thus a more reliable reading.

Therefore, since the textual evidence reveals that *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* 1) is attested by the earliest manuscripts, 2) is attested by the earliest manuscript traditions, and 3) is the most difficult reading, *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* must be adopted as the preserved original reading. Both the external and internal textual evidence support this analysis. Accordingly, since some scribes from each text-type have amended *αἰωνίου* to *ἁγίου*, this “improvement” may indicate an early widespread acceptance of *πνεύματος αἰωνίου* as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Apparently, the “Holy Spirit” view was a

²³ Indeed, both the Byzantine and Western text-types are riddled by “addition, omission, substitution, and ‘improvement’ of one kind or another.” Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*.

²⁴ Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 98-99.

prevalent early Christian interpretation of Hebrews 9:14.

Contextual Considerations

Now that it has been established that *πνεύματος* refers to the Holy Spirit, and that *αἰωνίου* represents the original reading, what does the phrase *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* mean, *actually*? What is the function of the Holy Spirit in the self-offering of Christ? To provide an answer to this question requires a proper grasp of the grammatical structure of Hebrews 9:13-14.

The *a fortiori* Structure

The meaning of *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in 9:14 is corollary to 9:13. Verses 13 and 14 are in an “if-then” conditional construction, wherein the elements of the protasis in verse 13 stand in parallel with the elements of the apodosis in verse 14. In other words, the components of verse 13 are in parallel construction with verse 14 *a minori ad maius*. In this way, the “blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer” in verse 13 correspond to the “blood of Christ” in verse 14. The object of cleansing in verse 13, namely “those who are defiled,” is replaced with “our consciences from dead works” in verse 14. “Sanctify” in verse 13 corresponds to “cleanse” in verse 14. The purpose clause “for the cleansing of the flesh” in verse 13 parallels “to serve the living God” in verse 14. Thus, it is clear that the elements of verse 14 find their antecedent element in verse 13. But what of the relative clause, “who *through the eternal spirit, offered* himself as blameless to God (*ὃς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ*)? Is this phrase corollary to any of the elements in verse 13?

Table 1. The structure of Hebrews 9:13-14

Syntactical Category	Hebrews 9:13	Hebrews 9:14
Subject clause	εἰ γὰρ τὸ αἷμα τράγων καὶ ταύρων καὶ σποδὸς δαμάλεως “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer...”	πόσῳ μᾶλλον τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ “How much more [shall] the blood of Christ...”
Adjectival Participle and relative clause	ῥαντίζουσα “...sprinkling...”	ὃς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ “...who through the eternal spirit, offered himself as blameless to God...”
Main verb	ἀγιάζει “...sanctify...”	καθαριεῖ “...cleanse...”
Object clause	τοὺς κεκοινωμένους “...those who have been defiled...”	τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων “...our consciences from dead works...”
Purpose clause	πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα “...for the cleansing of the flesh...”	εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι “...to serve the living God.”

The relative clause of verse 14 (ὃς... θεῷ) clearly modifies the substantive τοῦ Χριστοῦ. But perhaps less immediately apparent is that the participle of verse 13 (ῥαντίζουσα) is corollary to the relative clause of verse 14, as it likewise modifies a

substantive (σποδός), rather than the main verb (ἀγιάζει). Although the adverbial usage of the participle is most common in the absence of the article in the New Testament, in some cases, when a participle immediately precedes or follows a substantive – or a substantive phrase – and also agrees with that substantive in gender, number, and case, an anarthrous adjectival participle is justified.²⁵ In such an instance, the *anarthrous* adjectival participle functions precisely as the more common *arthrous* adjectival participle. Indeed, although “it is not possible to tell by position whether [an anarthrous adjectival participle] is attributive or predicate... this does not mean that such functions are not present; it only means that they cannot be determined by position.”²⁶ Therefore, since ῥαντίζουσα immediately follows the substantive phrase σποδός δαμάλεως, and agrees in female gender, singular number, and nominative case with σποδός, an anarthrous adjectival participle is the most plausible reading.

This adjectival rendering of the participle is particularly significant, because adjectival participles resemble relative clauses. According to Smyth, “relative clauses correspond to attributive adjectives (or participles), since like adjectives they serve to define substantives...”²⁷ Indeed, Black asserts, “the best way to translate an attributive participle is by means of a relative clause.”²⁸ Therefore, the attributive participle “sprinkling” (ῥαντίζουσα) of verse 13 functions similarly to the relative clause of verse 14. The most natural correlate of the relative clause in verse 14 is the adjectival participle ῥαντίζουσα in verse 13.

On the basis of the conditional structure of this text, then, the relative clause ὅς

²⁵ James L. Boyer, “The Classification of Participles,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5.2 (1984): 167.

²⁶ Boyer, “The Classification of Participles,” 167.

²⁷ Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1920), 560.

²⁸ David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*, (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 150.

διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ in verse 14 must be the superior instantiation of the adjectival *ῥαντίζουσα* in verse 13. Since *ῥαντίζουσα* is grammatically parallel to this relative clause, the former is interpretive of the latter. That is, the latter reflects the function of the former in a greater degree. Therefore, if the meaning old testament referent of *ῥαντίζουσα* can be determined, the referent of *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου... προσήνεγκεν* will be clarified. In other words, if the manner of the aforementioned old testament sprinkling can be demonstrated, the function of the Holy Spirit in the self-offering of Christ will be elucidated.

Consequently, a study of the Old Testament passage to which the author refers in Hebrews 9:13b is necessary to determine the author's use of *ῥαντίζουσα*. "Sprinkling" (*ῥαντίζουσα*) modifies the "ashes of a heifer" (*σποδὸς δαμάλεως*) in a clear allusion to the cleansing ritual of Numbers 19. Therefore, an investigation of the manner of sprinkling in Numbers 19 is necessary to determine the author's use of *ῥαντίζουσα*.

The Sprinkling Ashes of a Heifer

According to Numbers 19:18, the ceremonial sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer was cathartic; it was used to ceremonially purify defiled houses (*τὸν οἶκον*), vessels (*τὰ σκεύη*), and persons (*τὰς ψυχάς*). Numbers 19:2-10 outlines the preparation for this cleansing ritual. The Israelites would bring to Moses and Aaron an "unblemished red heifer in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never been mounted."²⁹ Then it was given to Eleazar the priest, in order that it might be slaughtered in his presence. Eleazar would then "take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times."³⁰ After this sacrifice and manual-sprinkling, the body of the red heifer was burned in the sight of Eleazar, including "its

²⁹ Num 19:2

³⁰ Num 19:4

hide, its flesh, and its blood, with its refuse...”³¹ At this time the priest would “take cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet material, and throw it into the midst of the burning heifer.”³² After the burning was completed, and both the priest and the man who burnt the holocaust washed their clothes and bathed their bodies in water, the ashes were transferred by a clean man (*ἄνθρωπος καθαρὸς*) from the camp to a clean place outside the camp. These ashes were kept by “the congregation of the sons of Israel...for water to remove impurity; it is purification from sin.”³³ Finally, the man who transferred the ashes of the red heifer would wash his clothes.

Numbers 19:11-16 then outlines various cases in which the one might become unclean. Ceremonially impurity may be contracted by unintentional contact with a dead body, a human bone, a grave, or entrance into a tent in which a human has died. This person shall be unclean for seven days and shall wash themselves on the third and seventh days. And then Numbers 19:17-19 describes the process by which the ashes cleansed the defiled. Verse 17-19 state,

“...for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and running water shall be added to them in a container. And a clean person shall take hyssop (*ῥόσσωπον*), dip it in the water, and sprinkle (*περιρρανεῖ*) it on the tent, on all the furnishings, on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one who was killed or the one who died naturally, or the grave. Then the clean person shall sprinkle (*περιρρανεῖ*) on the unclean on the third day and the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify him, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and will be clean by evening.”³⁴

Thus, the ashes of the red heifer, would be sprinkled for cleansing persons and objects who have been defiled from contact with a dead body.³⁵ Indeed the act of sprinkling applied the purificatory properties of the ashes of the red heifer to the defiled subject.

³¹ Num 19:5

³² Num 19:6

³³ Num 19:9

³⁴ Num 19:17-19

³⁵ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 261.

Now, the manner in which these defiled persons were sprinkled is significant. The ashes of the red heifer were transferred to the defiled through a hyssop branch. In this way, the hyssop plant was utilized as an applicator of the cleansing substance. After flowing water and the ashes were mixed in a vessel, a clean person took hyssop, dipped the hyssop in the watery-ashes, and then sprinkled the ashes via the hyssop branch. In other words, the hyssop branch functioned *instrumentally* in the sprinkling ritual. Therefore, the two occurrences of περιρρανεῖ in Numbers 19:18 and 19:19 must be understood as occurring via the medium of hyssop. Indeed, the ashes of the red heifer were sprinkled *through* hyssop.

Moreover, Gordon Wenham rightly notes that the ritual sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer theologically parallels sin offerings under the old covenant:

Both those who prepare the ash and those who sprinkle the water containing it become unclean, though not as seriously as the man who has touched the corpse. All they need to do is to wash and wait till evening (7-10,21). Though perplexing at first sight, this is quite consonant with the ash being regarded as a cleanser like blood. Sacrificial blood is cleansing when correctly used, but garments or vessels accidentally splashed with it must be washed or destroyed (Lev 6:27-28). Similarly, it is the discharge of blood associated with menstruation and childbirth that makes them occasions for uncleanness (Lev 12; 15:19ff).³⁶

In this way, the ashes of a heifer functioned just as the blood of a sin offering. According to Wenham, “when the ash had been prepared, it was collected and kept outside the camp ready to be mixed with water where required. It thus acted as an instant sin offering.”³⁷

Therefore, since this ritual of “sprinkling” (περιρρανεῖ) in Numbers 19 is the referent of Hebrews 9:13, ῥαντίζουσα must incorporate the notion of sprinkling *via hyssop* in Hebrews 9:13. Moreover, since the “sprinkling” (ῥαντίζουσα) of verse 13 is in parallel with the relative clause of verse 14, “who offered himself as blameless to God through

³⁶ Wenham, *Numbers: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1981, 164.

³⁷ Wenham, *Numbers: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, 164. See also J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow”, *VT*, 31, 1981.

the eternal Spirit” (ὅς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ), the former is interpretive of the latter. Christ’s self-offering must also be understood to incorporate the idea of sprinkling via hyssop. Although the relative clause describes an offering (9:14), and the participle describes a cleansing (9:13), this cleansing nonetheless functioned like an “instant sin offering.”³⁸ In this way, Christ’s self-offering parallels this cleansing sprinkling. The author of Hebrews perceives “the eternal Spirit” as the superior instrument of sprinkling, through which Christ “offered” himself to God the Father.

Hebrews’ Usage of ῥαντίζω

In order to thoroughly establish the meaning of ῥαντίζουσα, an investigation of ῥαντίζω and its referents in the OT must be performed throughout the book of Hebrews. The word ῥαντίζω occurs four times in the New Testament, all of which appear here in the book of Hebrews in 9:13, 19, 21, and 10:22. In 9:19, ῥαντίζω is found in an aorist active indicative verbal form, in the third person singular conjugation. Hebrews 9:19 reads,

19λαληθείσης γὰρ πάσης ἐντολῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὑπὸ Μωϋσέως παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, λαβῶν τὸ αἷμα τῶν μόσχων μετὰ ὕδατος καὶ ἐρίου κοκκίνου καὶ ὑσσώπου αὐτό τε τὸ βιβλίον καὶ πάντα τὸν λαὸν ἐράντισεν³⁹

⁹For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.⁴⁰

The author refers to Exodus 24:5-7 wherein Moses sprinkled the people of God and the words of the Lord with the blood of a sacrifice. In this OT passage, upon Israel’s commitment to obey the words which the Lord had commanded, Moses commanded a sacrifice to be performed. He then sprinkled half of the blood on the altar and sprinkled the remaining blood on the people of Israel.⁴¹ But although Moses sprinkled both the altar

³⁸ Wenham, *Numbers*, 164.

³⁹ Heb 9:19

⁴⁰ Heb 9:19

⁴¹ Notably, nowhere in Exod 24 does Moses explicitly sprinkle the book of the covenant, as the

and the people, Exodus 24 does not record Moses utilizing water, scarlet wool, or hyssop to perform the sprinkling. These details mentioned in Hebrews 9:19 are nowhere to be found in Exodus 24. Indeed, Exodus 24:5-7 says:

He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."⁴²

Why then was Moses said to have employed these three elements of water, scarlet wool, and hyssop in Hebrews 9:19? Since the author demonstrates a competent grasp of the OT throughout the letter, it is most likely because the author understands the sprinkling of the offering of Exodus 24 to reflect the cleansing sprinkling of Leviticus 14. Because the ideas of cleansing are similar in both of these passages, the author interprets Exodus 24 in light of Leviticus 14. The only reference to sprinklings which explicitly utilize the blood of a sacrifice, water, scarlet wool, and hyssop is found in Leviticus 14, which describes a cleansing ritual for lepers. Leviticus 14:4-7 reads:

καὶ προστάξει ὁ ἱερεὺς καὶ λήμψονται τῷ κεκαθαρισμένῳ δύο ὀρνίθια ζῶντα καθαρὰ καὶ ξύλον κέδρινον καὶ κεκλωσμένον κόκκινον καὶ ὕσσωπον καὶ προστάξει ὁ ἱερεὺς καὶ σφάξουσιν τὸ ὀρνίθιον τὸ ἐν εἰς ἀγγεῖον ὀστράκινον ἐφ' ὕδατι ζῶντι καὶ τὸ ὀρνίθιον τὸ ζῶν λήμψεται αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ξύλον τὸ κέδρινον καὶ τὸ κλωστὸν κόκκινον καὶ τὸν ὕσσωπον καὶ βάψει αὐτὰ καὶ τὸ ὀρνίθιον τὸ ζῶν εἰς τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ὀρνιθίου τοῦ σφαγέντος ἐφ' ὕδατι ζῶντι καὶ περιρρανεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν καθαρισθέντα ἀπὸ τῆς λέπρας ἐπτὰκις καὶ καθαρὸς ἔσται καὶ ἐξαποστελεῖ τὸ ὀρνίθιον τὸ ζῶν εἰς τὸ πεδῖον⁴³

⁴then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. ⁵The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. ⁶As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. ⁷He shall then *sprinkle* seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird

author of Hebrews states. The author must be theologically interpreting this text in light of Lev 14.

⁴² Exod 24:5-7

⁴³ Lev 14:4-7

go free over the open field.⁴⁴

Thus, the author is unconcerned to quote the cleansing ceremony of Exodus 24 directly, but rather to read it in light of the cleansing ritual of Leviticus 14. And why does the author make this interpretive move? He employs this imagery in order to highlight the common instrument, hyssop, which is utilized to sprinkle blood offerings for cleansing.

This hyssop was a commonly used in cleansing rituals is further confirmed by Leviticus 14:51-51, wherein hyssop – along with scarlet yarn and a live bird – was dipped in the blood of a sacrifice and then employed for sprinkling. Leviticus 14:51-52 says,

καὶ λήμψεται τὸ ξύλον τὸ κέδρινον καὶ τὸ κεκλωσμένον κόκκινον καὶ τὸν ὕσσωπον καὶ τὸ ὄρνιθιον τὸ ζῶν καὶ βάψει αὐτὸ εἰς τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ὄρνιθίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἐφ' ὕδατι ζῶντι καὶ περιρρανεῖ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπτὰκις καὶ ἀφαγνιεῖ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ὄρνιθίου καὶ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι τῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ὄρνιθίῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ τῷ κεδρίνῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ ὕσσωπῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κεκλωσμένῳ κοκκίνῳ

Then he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet string, with the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the slaughtered bird as well as in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. So he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and with the running water, along with the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet string.

In this way, Hyssop acted as the medium through which the blood and water were applied to leprous scales, leprous garments, corrupted houses, swellings, scabs, and for bright spots on the skin. Evidently, the author of Hebrews thematically interprets hyssop as the common instrument through which cathartic sprinklings were performed.

Water and hyssop both represented instruments in their own right in Leviticus. Water is utilized 47 times throughout the book of Leviticus in association with cleansing, and especially twice here Leviticus 14 in the performance of a sacrifice over “living/moving water” (ἐφ' ὕδατι ζῶντι). Likewise, hyssop is associated with cleansing in all five of its occurrences in Leviticus. Hyssop also became the metaphorical instrument of David's inner sprinkling (ῥαντιεῖς) for the cleansing after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah. Psalm 51:7 says:

⁴⁴ Lev 14:4-7

ῥαντιεῖς με ὑσσώπῳ καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι πλυνεῖς με καὶ ὑπὲρ χιόνα λευκανθήσομαι⁴⁵

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.⁴⁶

Therefore, although hyssop was itself a cleansing agent, it also functioned as the vehicle through which the cleansing blood and water were applied to defiled persons and objects.

In summary, when the author of Hebrews employs “sprinkling” in Hebrews 9:19, he has in mind the idea of cleansing via hyssop. A hyssop branch is the instrument of cleansing Leviticus 14. And since the author theologically interprets Exodus 24 through the lens of the cleansing ritual of Leviticus 14, the author perceives hyssop as the instrument Moses employed to cleanse the book and the people. In this way, Hebrews 9:19 theologically interprets the OT to see hyssop as the common means by which the defiled are cleansed.

Furthermore, Hebrews 9:21 utilizes the verb ῥαντίζω in the aorist tense, active voice, indicative mood, third person singular conjugation. He expresses the same interpretation of “sprinkling” here. Hebrews 9:21 reads,

καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν δὲ καὶ πάντα τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας τῷ αἵματι ὁμοίως ἐράντισεν.⁴⁷

And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.⁴⁸

The sprinkling performed over those defiled by skin diseases and over defiled houses and garments was the same sprinkling through hyssop referenced in 9:19. That is, the tabernacle and the objects therein were cleansed via hyssop. But although Hebrews claims that the tabernacle furnishings were cleansed by means of hyssop, water, and scarlet wool, this is again, nowhere to be found in the book of Leviticus. Rather,

⁴⁵ Ps 50:9

⁴⁶ Ps 50:9

⁴⁷ Heb 9:21

⁴⁸ Heb 9:21

regarding the cleansing of the tent of meeting, Leviticus 16:14-16 states that the sprinkling was performed with the high priest's finger:

¹⁴Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. ¹⁵“Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities.⁴⁹

Since the sacrificial blood was sprinkled by the finger of the high priest, why does Hebrews 9:21 claim that the temple was cleansed “in the same way” (ὁμοίως) – namely via a hyssop branch, water, and scarlet wool? For the same reason the author interpreted Exodus 24 in light of Leviticus 14, the author here again interprets Leviticus 16 in light of Leviticus 14. The author seeks to demonstrate a theological concept that the benefits of cleansing are extended through the instrument of hyssop.

That the author is concerned to highlight the means by which the sacrificial blood cleansed the defiled is furthermore confirmed by the author's lack of attention to subsidiary OT details in Hebrews 9:21. This verse spotlights Moses as the sprinkler of the tabernacle, whereas it was Moses' brother Aaron who actually sprinkled the tent of meeting, according to Leviticus 16. The author of Hebrews is not concerned to recapitulate all of the details of Leviticus 16, because he is concentrated on highlighting the central theme that cathartic sprinkling occurs through and the instrument of hyssop. Indeed, the hyssop branch, water, and scarlet wool all participated in the offerings of animals, in that they transmitted the blood of the offering to bring cleansing.

Moreover, in Hebrews 10:21-22 the final occurrence of sprinkling (ῥεραντισμένοι) in the NT appears with reference to the cleansing of conscience.

⁴⁹ Lev 16:14-16

“Sprinkled” occurs as a perfect passive participle, in the masculine, plural, nominative form. The author draws from the OT imagery of cleansing by sprinkling in Exodus and Leviticus, and applies it to the inner cleansing of the heart, similar to Ezekiel 36.

Hebrews 10:19-22 reads,

¹⁹Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ²⁰ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, ²¹καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, ²²προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφῶρᾳ πίστεως, *ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ.*⁵⁰

¹⁹Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, *having our hearts sprinkled clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.⁵¹

Thus, according to Hebrews, the blood of the great high priest Jesus Christ, who mediates a new and superior covenant, cleanses through sprinkling. This notion of sprinkling for cleansing via the priest, originating in Exodus and Leviticus, is subsequently utilized in Ezekiel 36, to describe the inner cleansing promised in the coming new covenant. Notably, this cleansing is associated with the eschatological Spirit of God. Ezekiel 36:25-27 says,

²⁵καὶ ῥανῶ ἔφ' ὑμᾶς ὕδωρ καθαρὸν καὶ καθαρισθήσεσθε ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν καὶ καθαριῶ ὑμᾶς ²⁶καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν καρδίαν καινὴν καὶ πνεῦμα καινὸν δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ἀφελῶ τὴν καρδίαν τὴν λιθίνην ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν καρδίαν σαρκίνην ²⁷καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά μου δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ποιήσω ἵνα ἐν τοῖς δικαιώμασίν μου πορεύησθε καὶ τὰ κρίματά μου φυλάξησθε καὶ ποιήσητε⁵²

²⁵Then *I will sprinkle clean water on you*, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷*I will put My Spirit within you* and cause you to

⁵⁰ Heb 10:19-22

⁵¹ Heb 10:19-22

⁵² Ezek 36:25-27

walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.⁵³

This inner cleansing, as prophesied by Ezekiel, comes by means of the sprinkling of clean water, which as has been shown to be performed via hyssop in the author's view. In other words, this occurrence of ῥαντίζω indicates that the cleansing of the inner man is performed through a cathartic instrument. Like, Hebrews 9:19 and 9:22, Hebrews 10:22 affirms that the sprinkling ritual necessitates an agent through which the blood is delivered, namely a hyssop branch.

In sum, “sprinkling” (ῥαντίζω) in the book of Hebrews always refers to the use of the cathartic instrument of hyssop, by which a cleansing substance is transferred to defiled objects and persons. This reference to hyssop as the instrument of sprinkling is therefore latent in the “sprinkling” of Hebrews 9:13. Moreover, since the relative clause of Hebrews 9:14 is structurally parallel to the “hyssop sprinkling” of 9:13, the relative clause must also preserve this idea of “hyssop sprinkling.” The most natural element of this relative clause to refer to this is hyssop sprinkling is “through the eternal spirit” (διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου), with the διὰ + genitive construction functioning instrumentally.

Therefore, just as a cleansing substance was sprinkled through hyssop to cleanse defiled persons and objects, so also the cleansing substance of Christ's self-offering was sprinkled through the “supreme hyssop” of the Holy Spirit unto God the Father. In other words, Christ presented the benefits of his sacrifice to the Father through the “instrument” of the Holy Spirit. Christ's blood was not preserved in heaven in a literal sense, but rather the merits of his self-sacrifice were bestowed before the Father. It was necessary that the eternal Spirit who “sprinkles” the merits of Christ's sacrifice before the Father, in order that “eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), “eternal redemption” (9:12), and an “eternal inheritance” may be secured. According to Pizarro, “Cristo entró al santuario celestial por la eficacia de su propia sangre. No hubo necesidad de que Cristo llevara su

⁵³ Ezek 36:25-27

sangre literal al santuario celestial para completar su obra de expiación por el pecado.”⁵⁴

Indeed,

The blood of Christ offered through the eternal Spirit is a vivid juxtaposition of phrases and indeed of realms of thinking. Here we are close to the very genius of our author. He means both phrases to be understood literally, yet not mechanically or magically. The offering Christ made in the realm of reality, as tangible and real as blood, as central and decisive as life (blood). Yet it was not an offering on the plane of animal existence; it was transmuted into an eternal redemption because it was made through the eternal Spirit.⁵⁵

Accordingly, the blood sprinkling of Christ through the “eternal Spirit” grounds an eschatological redemption. This sprinkling of Christ’s blood – by the instrument of the eternal Spirit in the heavenly tabernacle – is analogous to the blood-sprinkling via hyssop in the earthly tabernacle.

Heavenly Sprinkling in 9:7-11, 18-22

Although scholars generally agree that “these verses [Heb 9:11-14] deal with Christ’s sacerdotal function,” the meaning of the greater tabernacle remains subject to scholarly controversy.⁵⁶ Although it is clear that Christ’s self-offering is superior to the Levitical animal offerings at the earthly tabernacle, disagreement persists regarding the meaning of this “greater... tabernacle.” Hebrews 9:11-12 reads,

Χριστὸς δὲ παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως οὐδὲ δι’ αἵματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος, εἰσῆλθεν ἐφάπαξ εἰς τὰ ἅγια, αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle*, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Some scholars suggest that this greater and more perfect tabernacle (τῆς μείζονος καὶ

⁵⁴ Pizarro, *Acceso Al Santuario Celestial Por La Sangre de Cristo*, 51.

⁵⁵ Alexander C. Purdy, *Hebrews: The Interpreters Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 692.

⁵⁶ Emmrich, “Amtscharisma,” 17.

τελειότερας σκηνης) refers to Christ's human nature, as in John 1:14 wherein the eternal Word "tabernacled among us" (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν)?⁵⁷ Others view this as an allusion to the eucharist.⁵⁸ Still others perceive this "holy place" (9:12) as a room inside a literal tabernacle in heaven.⁵⁹ But, most likely, the author of Hebrews speaks analogically. Referring to the "[greater tabernacle] becomes a vehicle for describing the indescribable, for depicting the presence of God."⁶⁰ Indeed, Schreiner notes that "the author is often imprecise in describing features of the OT cult, and hence we should not make the mistake of pressing his language here."⁶¹ Cockerill helpfully notes that a literal understanding of a heavenly tabernacle is unnecessary to the author's theology:

In the New there is no need for a heavenly 'Holy Place' since Christ brings his people into the very presence of God. Thus, any suggestion that 'the greater and more perfect Tent' represents a heavenly 'Holy Place' is nothing more than a vestigial remnant from the parallel the pastor has drawn between Old Tent and the New.⁶²

Since the "greater temple" which Christ entered was heaven, the manner in which Christ offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit can be further clarified.

⁵⁷ Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 66-67.

⁵⁸ James Swetnam, "'The Greater and More Perfect Tent': A Contribution to the Discussion of Hebrews 9,11," *Bib 47* [1966]: 91-106, cited in Schreiner, Thomas, R, *Hebrews: Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 266.

⁵⁹ Otfried Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetischreligionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19f. und 10,19f.*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 14* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972), 50-73; and Benjamin J. Ribbens, *Levitical Cult and Heavenly Sacrifice in Hebrews*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); and David M. Moffit, *Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Boston: Brill, 2013), 223-25, cited in Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 266.

⁶⁰ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 267. See also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: The Anchor Bible*, (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 409, and Kenneth L. Schenk, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159, cited in Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 267. See also Norman H. Young, "The Gospel according to Hebrews 9," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), 198-210. Young provides a concise summary of the scholarly debate regarding the meaning of the "greater... tabernacle."

⁶¹ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 267.

⁶² Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 391, cited in Schreiner, Thomas, R, *Hebrews: Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 267.

Heaven, as the more perfect temple, is the new place in which the superior high priest “offered” his sacrifice. Much like the old covenant, the high priest, once per year, would sacrifice for sins and offer the sacrificial blood through sprinkling in the “inner tabernacle”, namely the Holy of Holies. The high priest would sprinkle this holy place with the blood of bulls and goats, as Hebrews 9:7-9 records,

γείς δὲ τὴν δευτέραν ἀπαξ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ὁ μόνος ὁ ἀρχιερεύς, οὐ χωρὶς αἵματος, ὃ προσφέρει ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων, στοῦτο δηλοῦντος τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, μήπω πεφανερῶσθαι τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸν ἔτι τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς ἐχούσης στάσιν, ἧτις παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα, καθ’ ἣν δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίαι προσφέρονται μὴ δυνάμεναι κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα⁶³

⁷but into the second, only the high priest *enters* once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly, both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience⁶⁴

This sacrificial offering was accomplished according to the model set forth in Leviticus 16:14-16, in which the high priest Aaron was commanded by the Lord,

...take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. ¹⁵“Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities.⁶⁵

On Yom Kippur, the high priest would perform a cleansing ritual for the people and the temple. He would sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice inside of the inner veil of the tabernacle to procure cleansing for the impurities of the sons of Israel and for “the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities”. By sprinkling the blood

⁶³ Heb 9:7-9

⁶⁴ Heb 9:7-9.

⁶⁵ Lev 16:14-16

of the bull and goat before and around the mercy seat, the high priest would offer the blood of both the bull and the goat unto God. This is clear in the verbiage of Hebrews 9:7, wherein the high priest “offers” (προσφέρει) the blood in the holy of holies. In this way, the author of Hebrews perceives the sprinkling of blood on Yom Kippur as form of “offering.” Indeed, as demonstrated earlier, the author perceived this “offertory sprinkling” as performed by means of a hyssop branch.

Verses 11-12 make clear that as the high priest entered the earthly tabernacle once per year in the OT, so the great high priest from the order of Melchizedek entered the heavenly tabernacle once for all time. Jesus entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands. Hebrews 9:11-12 reads,

¹¹But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹²and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.⁶⁶

Thus, Jesus’ access as high priest into the “heavenly temple” was secured on the ground of his own pure, sprinkled blood. Jesus performed in the “heavenly tabernacle” what the high priests performed in the earthly. Christ brought the merits of his sacrifice before the presence of the Father, just as Aaron sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats in the presence of God. That is, Christ offered his sacrifice to the Father by means of the superior hyssop branch, the eternal Spirit. This explains how Christ was able to “offer” himself in the tabernacle of heaven, after his “offering” on the cross. Christ “sprinkled” his sacrifice before the Father in heaven, through the Holy Spirit who mystically “carried” the merits of Christ sacrifice and presented them in the immediate presence of the Father.

Because Hebrews 9:7-12 locates Jesus’ offering in the heavenly tabernacle, this “offering” of Hebrews 9:14 is best understood as a “sprinkling”. Although Jesus did

⁶⁶ Heb 9:11-12

perform his self-sacrifice on earth, he “sprinkled” his blood in the heavenly sanctuary. In other words, after Christ ascended and before he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Christ presented the merits of his sacrifice in the presence of the Father through the supreme sacerdotal instrument of the Holy Spirit.

Like Hebrews 9:7-11, verses 18-22 similarly speaks about the cleansing of the heavenly tabernacle. Hebrews 9:22-25 says,

²²And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. ²³Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.⁶⁷

That is, Christ entered heaven, and he cleansed the heavenly things with “sacrifices better than these”, namely his own blood. Thus, the “offering” (προσφέρω) Jesus performed in Hebrews 9:14 was a sprinkling of his blood upon the heavenly “altar.” The merits of Christ’s sacrifice were presented before the Father through the instrument of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, the phrase “eternal redemption” is significant because it contrasts the “temporary redemption” of blood sacrifices offered on earth under the old covenant with the eternal efficacy of the blood sacrifice offered in heaven. Schreiner notes,

As a result of Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice, he secured “eternal redemption” (aiwnian lutrwsin). The one sacrifice was an effective and definitive sacrifice, securing forgiveness of sins. In the OT redemption is related to Passover (Exodus 12-14), Freedom at Jubilee or liberation from Egypt is not eternal, and hence the redemption Jesus accomplished is far superior to what happened in the year of Jubilee or at the exodus. Both of these events point typologically to the redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the negative-positive sentence structure of verse 12 is parallel to the if-then

⁶⁷ Heb 9:22-25

structure of verses 13-14, where “eternal redemption” is parallel to “eternal Spirit”. This suggests that the basis for eternal redemption is, in part, based on the “Spirit’s” eternality.⁶⁸ Moreover, the anarthrous phrase probably emphasizes “the ‘eternal’ quality of the Spirit.”⁶⁹ Thus, the heavenly offering of Christ’s blood was sprinkled by the eternal Spirit, *in order* to procure eternal redemption.⁷⁰

προσφέρω and Hebrews

In order to thoroughly demonstrate that προσφέρω can retain the sense of “sprinkling”, a brief survey of the usage of all 20 occurrences of προσφέρω throughout the book of Hebrews is necessary. The verb προσφέρω occurs 20 times in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 5:1, gifts and sacrifices are said to be “offered” for sins, probably on the day of atonement.⁷¹ In Hebrews 5:3, Jesus was obligated to “offer” for sins. In 5:8, Jesus “offered up” prayers and supplications. In 8:3, every high priest is appointed “to offer” gifts and sacrifices, and again, it is necessary for the high priest to have something “to offer”. In 8:4, all priests “offer” gifts according to the law. In 9:7, the high priest “not without taking blood offers for himself and for the sins of ignorance...” In this case, the offering does not pertain to the sacrifice *per se*, but to the sprinkling of the mercy seat on Yom Kippur. In 9:9, gifts and sacrifices “are offered” which cannot perfect the worshipper’s conscience. In 9:25, Christ did not “offer himself” repeatedly. In 9:28, Christ “having been offered once to bear the sins of many”, will return at the Parousia to save those eagerly waiting for him. In 10:1 the sacrifices of the old covenant are

⁶⁸ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 457.

⁶⁹ G. L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 398

⁷⁰ H. W. Cassirer, *God’s New Covenant: a New Testament Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

⁷¹ Dana M. Harris, *Hebrews: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 116.

“continually offered every year”. In 10:2, the Levitical sacrifices did not cease “being. In 10:8, sacrifices “are offered according to the law”. In 10:11, every priest stands “offering repeatedly the same sacrifices”. In 10:12, Christ “had offered for all time” a single sacrifice for sins. In 11:4, Able “offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.” In 11:17, Abraham “offered up” Isaac. And in 12:7, “God is treating you as sons” (ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός).

Therefore, in light of this brief survey of each occurrence of προσφέρω in Hebrews, it becomes clear that προσφέρω is most often employed to denote the process of slaying a sacrifice upon an altar. Indeed, it is clear we have the language of sacrifice here.”⁷² But in this context, it does not *merely* describe a sacrifice. This “offering” is the greater instantiation of the Yom Kippur offering of Hebrews 9:7, which was not only offered upon an altar, but also in the Holy of Holies via sprinkling (9:7). Hebrews 9:7 reads,

εἰς δὲ τὴν δευτέραν ἄπαξ τοῦ ἑνιαυτοῦ ὁ μόνος ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς, οὐ χωρὶς αἵματος, ὃ προσφέρει ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων.

but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking *blood, which he offers* for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

Thus, given the author’s association of the high priest’s Day of Atonement offerings (9:7) with Christ’s self-offering (9:12, 14), it is most likely that this sacrificial language (προσφέρει) also includes the idea of “sprinkling.” Moreover, since – as has been shown – the author views the corollary “sprinkling” of 9:13 as a sprinkling via hyssop, it is natural to conclude that the “offering” of 9:14 includes the same. Indeed, Christ’s self-offering in the relative clause of 9:14 probably connotes his sacerdotal “sprinkling” in the heavenly Holy of Holies via the superior “hyssop” of the Holy Spirit.

⁷² Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 270.

CHAPTER 3
OWENITE SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY AS A WAY
FORWARD

The contention of this paper has been to demonstrate that in Hebrews 9:14, the Holy Spirit acts as the superior hyssop branch through which Christ presents the benefits of his sacrifice to the Father in heaven. But in order to establish this view as theologically viable – a proper Spirit-Christology must be ascertained. The work of Spirit Christology or “Pneuma Christology” consists in the study of the role of the Holy Spirit in the human life of Christ.

In this chapter, two influential orthodox views will be surveyed, which regard the role of the Holy Spirit in the miracles of Jesus Christ. First, Gerald Hawthorne’s view, which is founded on a functional kenotic Christology, will be examined. And secondly John Owen’s influential orthodox view, which is consistent with the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds, will be examined. It is the contention of this chapter that all of the miracles of Christ were performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, since miracles are divine actions, and no divine action is performed apart from the Holy Spirit. It will be demonstrated that John Owen most successfully maintains all the attributes of the divine essence (as Nicene Trinitarianism demands) and preserves the full humanity of Christ (as Chalcedonian Christology demands) in his view. It will also be shown that John Owen’s rendering of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of Christ best accounts for the divine order of operations. Thus, it will be demonstrated that the role of the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 9:14 as the “instrument” of Christ’s self-offering, is theologically viable.

Gerald Hawthorne's View

Gerald Hawthorne, propounding an Orthodox perspective, asserts that all of the supernatural works of Jesus are performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, because the Son divested himself of his divine attributes during his state of humiliation. Each of these proponents seeks to protect the humanity of Christ in some way. Hawthorne seeks to preserve the humanity of Christ by emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. According to Hawthorne, “The Holy Spirit was the divine power by which Jesus overcame his human limitations, rose above his human weakness, and won out over his human mortality.”¹ Jesus did not utilize his divine prerogatives – especially omniscience, omnipresence, or omnipotence – in the working of miracles, because he “had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). Because Jesus is fully human, according to the scriptures, he did not live as a “superhuman” who would make use of his divine attributes all of the time, often, or even occasionally.² In this way, Jesus lived as an impeccable human being “...filled with the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34). All of the divine power exerted in the human life of Jesus, therefore, came by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, otherwise Jesus did not live a fully human life.

In support of this perspective, Hawthorne proposes a modified Kenotic Christology in which Christ temporarily empties himself of divine attributes, in the sense that they remain latent or potential. The Kenotic theory claims that Christ “emptied himself” (Phil 2:7) of his divine attributes during his earthly humiliation. In his *The Presence and The Power*, Hawthorne argues,

¹ Gerald Hawthorn, *The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishing, 2003).

² Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012.

Divine attributes, including those of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, are not to be thought of as being laid aside when the eternal Son became human but rather thought of as becoming potential or latent within this incarnate one – present in Jesus in all their fullness but no longer in exercise.

Thus, “Hawthorne acknowledges a distinction between ontological kenotic Christology (OKC) and functional kenotic Christology (FKC).”³ Even though he does not argue so far as to claim the loss of divine attributes, he does assert a kind of suspension of divine attributes with respect to the Son.

Furthermore, when Hawthorne claims that the divine attributes of the Son are “latent”, he is making an assertion regarding the divine nature of Christ.⁴ At this point, one might accuse Hawthorne of proposing a view of divine nature which is merely “accessed” by each of the divine persons, rather than one which is possessed by each member of the Godhead. Kyle Claunch suggests that the late Hawthorne might reply to such a critique as follows:

One solution might be for Hawthorne (and other proponents of FKC) to insist that the attributes are not latent in the divine nature, *per se*. Rather, they are only latent insofar as they are not exercised by the person of the Son. So, the Father and the Spirit can continue exercising the omniscience of the one divine nature, even while the Son does not. In this way, the latency of the attributes does not affect the other persons of the Trinity.⁵

Such a proposal, therefore, is not discordant with Nicene Trinitarianism, *per se*, because the deity of all three members of the Trinity are sustained. Simply because the Son is making a choice to withhold use of his divine attributes during his earthly state of humiliation, does not mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit may not continue to use

³ Kyle Claunch, *The Son and the Spirit: The Promise of Spirit Christology in Traditional Trinitarian and Christological Perspective*, Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017, 56.

⁴ Claunch, *The Son and the Spirit*, 57.

⁵ Claunch, *The Son and the Spirit*, 58. Claunch goes on to say that this “solution” raises as many serious problems as it attempts to solve. This is NOT a viable solution to Hawthorne’s dilemma, in actuality. Claunch’s view is that Hawthorne remains confessionally orthodox. However, Hawthorne’s theological proposal is inconsistent with his confession for reasons that Hawthorne did not fully understand or even attempt to explore.

them. When the Son disadvantaged himself of his divine attributes (although possessing them latently), the other members of the Godhead did not – and must not have, since all of creation would not remain apart from the active sustaining providence of God.

John Owen's View

Much like Hawthorne's view, John Owen contends that the Holy Spirit is involved in all of the miracles of Jesus. But a critical distinction arises in Owen's perspective, whereby Owen accounts for the Holy Spirit's involvement without maintaining FKC. To maintain Nicene Trinitarianism, it is essential to affirm the active role of the third person of the Trinity whenever Jesus exercises divine power. Fundamental to this perspective is that whenever a member of the Trinity acts towards creation, the entire Trinity acts.

The order of operation in which the members of the Godhead act is: from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. The role of the Father is "planner" and "designer", the role of the Son is "agent", and the role of the Holy Spirit is "completer" and "perfector". Since each member of the Godhead's actions are indivisible Trinitarian actions, it must follow that the actions of the Son are actions of the Godhead. Even though the Son of God is incarnate, and acts according to his human nature, his human actions are nonetheless Trinitarian actions, since he is himself God. John Owen notes, "...the nature of God, which is the principle of all divine operations, is one and the same, undivided in them all."⁶ The Son continues to act as "agent" of the Father, and "bestower" of the Spirit. If Jesus is performing miracles with respect to his deity as God the Son – but not by the power of the Holy Spirit – then the divine order of operations is rendered obsolete. Whenever the Son acts according to his divinity, he acts by the Holy Spirit. Since miracles are exercises of divine power, Jesus must act by the power of the

⁶John Owen, *Pneumatologia: The Works of John Owen*, vol 3, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009).

Holy Spirit when he performs miracles.

Furthermore, to maintain the Hypostatic Union (as explicated at Chalcedon), one must affirm the simultaneous actions of Jesus as both human and divine in Jesus' miracles. Jesus' human actions are not at odds with his divine actions; his actions in his divinity and humanity are inseparably coordinate. When the Son acts according to his humanity, therefore, he acts simultaneously with his divine nature. In this way, when Jesus performs miracles, he does so by both his human and divine nature. As divine, the Son heals by the Spirit, and through the Son's humanity he heals by the Spirit. Put another way: as human, the Son heals by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus through his divine nature. In other words, Jesus' miraculous works are simultaneously through Jesus' human nature and his divine nature, and thus by the Spirit (according to the divine order of operations). To postulate that Jesus works miracles by his mere divinity, but not according to his human nature, is both a deviation from the divine order of operations and an aberration of the biblical witness to uni-personhood of the Son of God. Such a division between Jesus "divine choices" and his "human choices" naturally lead to the doubling of his personhood, as in Nestorianism.

Instead, it is most biblically faithful to affirm the work of the Spirit in all acts of Jesus – including his miraculous acts – since the work of the Trinity towards creation unites the two natures of the Son. The Father manifests divine power through the divine Son, by the Spirit, in the Son's created (human) nature, for miraculous work. John Owen, a puritan pneumatologist, argues that the Holy Spirit's role in every divine act is one of application and perfection. He contends for the Holy Spirit as "the immediate efficient cause of all divine operations."⁷ Again, he asserts that

The Holy Ghost doth immediately work and effect whatever was to be done in reference unto the person of the Son or sons of men, for the perfecting and

⁷ Owen, *Pneumatologia*.

accomplishment of the Father's counsel and the Son's work, in an especial application of both unto their especial effects and ends.⁸

In this way, the Son is both the bestower and the bearer of the Holy Spirit; he is both the object – with respect to his humanity – and the subject – with respect to his divinity. According to his human nature, he performs Spirit-empowered miracles, and according to his divine nature, he bestows the Spirit upon his human nature. Because of the Holy Spirit's critical role as "efficient cause" in the divine order of operations, the two natures of the Son are united and indivisible in miraculous operation.

Critical Evaluation

The Bankruptcy of FKC

Although Hawthorne's FKC view strives to account for the biblical witness on the role of the Holy Spirit in the miracles of Jesus, it falls short in a variety of ways. First, Philippians 2 is clear that the manner in which Jesus "emptied himself" in his incarnation was by "taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7). The sense in which the Son "emptied himself", therefore, regards the Son's acquisition of a lowly human nature, rather than his divine nature. The divine nature is unaffected, unchanged, and immutable, and continually exercised. The human nature, however, is weak and meek and is added to the Son. "Emptied", in this sense, is equivalent with "humbled". With respect to this verse, the only "humbling" which has taken place is the procurement of a lowly human nature, since "...his 'kenosis' or self-emptying was his taking the servant's form, and this involved the necessary limitation of his glory which he laid aside in order that he might be born in human likeness".⁹ There is no indication that the Son "empties himself of access" to his divine powers in the sense that omnipotence or

⁸ Owen, *Pneumatologia*.

⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 109.

omniscience remains latent in the Son's divine nature.

Hawthorne's understanding of divine "nature" also affects his interpretation of Philippians 2:7. He speaks of the attributes of God as that which is "accessed" by each person of the Godhead rather than "possessed" by each person. This is perhaps clearest in his assertion about how Jesus emptied himself:

Divine attributes, including those of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, are... thought of as becoming potential or latent within this incarnate one – present in Jesus in all their fullness but no longer in exercise.

The present and unexercised divine attributes of Jesus are in a sort of storehouse, according to Hawthorne, from which Jesus may make use at any time. But in contrast, a biblical understanding of a nature is that attributes constitute the person. For example, Leviticus 19:2 says, "Be holy, for the Lord your God is holy". Holiness is not merely possessed by God; God *is* holy. Genesis 17:1b says, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless". God not only has power; he *is* almighty. His name "Almighty" describes who he is. Therefore, God's attributes cannot be merely accessed and retrieved, as Hawthorne insinuates with his suggestion of latency. God's attributes define who he is. God's attributes are what make God God.

Furthermore, to cease from the "exercise" of these attributes is to cease from being God. Thomas Aquinas – drawing from Aristotle – famously claimed that God is "pure act". There is no latency within the Godhead; he is in constant exercise of all of his attributes. For the Son to disadvantage himself of divine prerogatives during his human life on earth would require either a change in the Trinitarian order of operations *ad extra* (since the Son would not participate therein) or the cessation of the Son's divinity – both of which options find no ground in scripture. Perhaps it is better to assert that the Son, "grew in wisdom...", according to his human nature and that the Son remained omniscient according to his divine nature. Jesus was not a super-human, nor was his divinity limited. The Chalcedonian Creed states this explicitly,

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin...¹⁰

What is true of each of the Son's nature's is true of the Son's person; the Son is truly God and truly man, and therefore both omnipotent and weak, omniscient and learning, omnipresent and local. In this way, Hawthorne's claim of the Son's self-limiting of divine attributes is a claim regarding the divine nature. Therefore, although Hawthorne does not claim that the Son ceased to be God in his state of humiliation – because of his misunderstanding of divine nature – the logical result of the Son temporarily relinquishing possession of divine attributes would be the de-God-ing of the Son.

Not only does the Bible's denotation of God's nature reveal that his attributes are possessed, but the scriptures also demonstrate that these attributes have never ceased to be exercised. Hebrews 1:3 makes clear that the Son "upholds the universe by the Word of his power". The Son of God is the active agent through which the cosmos is maintained. Colossians 1:17 says, "And he is before all things and in him all things hold together". Jesus binds all of creation together in its' present order, sustaining its' existence. Although the Bible is silent about the Son's role in maintaining the universe during his human life on earth, Hebrews 1:3 demonstrates that his human nature does not preclude him from sustaining the cosmos. Hebrews and Colossians were both written after Christ's glorification, and thus when they speak in the present tense of Jesus' maintenance of the universe, they speak of Jesus as both God and glorified human. Furthermore, since the universe has evidently been sustained during the Son's human life on earth – given the continuation of human history – it is safe to conclude that the Son was its' sustainer.

¹⁰ The Chalcedonian Creed, in *The Council of Chalcedon*. (Christian Apologetics and Research, 2020), <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/ncene.html> (April 16th, 2018).

Although the late Hawthorne might have responded that the Father or the Spirit maintained the universe in the Son's stead, during his state of humiliation, it must be remembered that God's operations *ad extra* (towards creation) are indivisible works of all three members of the Godhead. Thus, either God temporarily changed his regular operations *ad extra* (to "From Father, without Son, through Spirit") to sustain the universe, or the normal Trinitarian Operations persisted. The burden of evidence, therefore, is on Hawthorne to prove the change in Trinitarian operations, of which the bible is silent. The Biblical picture, rather, is of the second member of the Godhead as eternally active (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). Furthermore, Hawthorne might reply that the glorification of Christ's humanity was a necessary prerequisite for the exercise of his divine attributes after his state of humiliation, which is why Hebrews and Colossians may speak this way of the Son. But nowhere in scripture does Christ's glorification result in his operation of otherwise latent attributes. Therefore, scripture points to the Son as sustainer of the universe in his state of humiliation. The FKC perspective is bankrupt of biblical support. While the Son was a baby in Bethlehem and when he was a man on a cross, he was upholding the universe by the word of his power, because in him, all things consist.

John Owen's Way Forward

As opposed to Hawthorne's perspective, John Owen's view of the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus faithfully maintains the biblical witness, and harmonizes with Nicene Trinitarianism, Chalcedonian Christology, and the Trinitarian Order of Operations *ad extra*. Primarily, his perspective is based on the notion that miracles are divine actions performed upon creation, and are thus Trinitarian Operations *ad extra*. Because supernatural works are impossible for humans, and because Jesus is truly human, it is clear that divine assistance is necessary for the performance of Jesus' miracles. Moreover, the scriptures cite the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ. For example, Matthew 12:28 says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the

kingdom of God has come upon you”. Because “...Jesus does in fact cast out demons by the Spirit of God...”¹¹ divine assistance is evident in the miracles of Christ.

Furthermore, it is critical to evaluate the synoptic parallel of Matthew 12:28 in Luke 11:20, to clarify what sort of divine assistance is received: “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”. The Holy Spirit is here called the “finger of God.” John Owen understands this to be a reference to the Holy Spirit as the “efficient cause” of Trinitarian action, and thus – with James R. Edwards – contends that this phrase “...could signify ‘instrumentality.’”¹² The finger is the final and completing part of a bodily action. Utilizing the analogy of grasping a rock: the mind instructs, the arm bends, and the finger grasps. Whether or not the Father perfectly corresponds to the mind or the Son flawlessly corresponds to the arm, the Spirit is the “efficient” or “completing” cause of rock-grasping. The Holy Spirit, therefore, provided divine assistance in Jesus’ performance of miracles as the efficient cause of Trinitarian action. All actions of the Holy Spirit are actions of the entire Godhead, and thus include the Father and the Son. Therefore, not only should the Holy Spirit’s assistance be understood as necessary to Jesus’ supernatural works, but the assistance of the entire Godhead.

Therefore, because all divine action is completed via the Holy Spirit, and because the work of the Holy Spirit towards creation is a work of the entire Godhead, all of Jesus’ miracles should be understood through a Trinitarian paradigm. Passages which indicate Jesus’s exercise of temporary omniscience, and exercise of divine power, should be understood as Trinitarian Actions. Jesus did receive divine knowledge, but this was given by the Holy Spirit, and thus by the Trinity. Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 316.

¹² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 345.

God, and thus by the Trinity. Thus, every miracle in the Son's human life is properly said to be accomplished by the Father, the Son (with respect to his divinity), and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowered all of Jesus' miracles, because the Trinity empowered his miracles.

In light of this notion that the Trinity empowered Jesus miracles, one may ask, does this double the personhood of the Son? If the Son – with respect to his humanity – performs a miracle and the Son – with respect to his divinity – empowers that miracle, does this not imply a Nestorian bifurcation of the personhood of the Son? This is certainly not the case. When the Son acts according to his humanity, he acts simultaneously according to his divine nature. Jesus remains very God of very God, as is explicated clearly in the Nicene creed,

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.¹³

Jesus' miraculous work and empowerment thereof are therefore one complex action. The second person of the Trinity remains as "God of God, Light of light, very God of very God" without augmenting his personhood in any fashion.

In these ways, John Owen faithfully maintains Nicene Trinitarianism, Chalcedonian Christology, and the Trinitarian Order of Operations. Owen's perspective highlights the necessary roles of each person of the Godhead in the miracles of Jesus. He guards against the Nestorian bifurcation of the Son into "the divine Son" and the "the human Son" because the human and divine actions of the Son are performed simultaneously by his singular person. Lastly, Owen utilizes the doctrine of the Spirit as the "efficient cause" of Trinitarian action to inform scriptures which may seem to indicate that Jesus acted according to his divine nature apart from the work of the Holy Spirit –

¹³ The Nicene Creed, in *The Council of Nicea, 325* (Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 2020), <https://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/chalcedonian-creed-451-ad>

which would contradict the Trinitarian order of operations and the doctrine of Simplicity. The theophanic event of Jesus walking on water should be understood as indicative of his divinity, but should also be comprehended as an event which was empowered by the Trinity. Therefore John Owen's view, built on the paradigm of the Trinitarian Order of Operations, most successfully maintains orthodoxy as preserved in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, accomplished all of his miracles by the Holy Spirit, because he accomplished them by the work of the entire Godhead.

Owenite Spirit-Christology in Hebrews 9:14

According to John Owen's convincing view, the Holy Spirit is involved in every action of the Son, including the Son's actions with respect to his human nature. In this way, it is certain that the Holy Spirit was involved in the self-offering of Christ in Hebrews 9:14. Moreover, according to Owen, the role of the Holy Spirit is the "efficient cause" in the action of the Son. This could signify the Spirit's "empowerment" of Christ to offer himself on the cross, just as the Spirit empowered Christ to endure the temptations of the devil in the wilderness in Luke 4:1. But this could equally signify the "instrumentality" of the Spirit in the life of Christ, just as Christ drove out demons through the power of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 12:28.¹⁴

Therefore, only two views are theologically viable; the "empowerment" view and this paper's "instrument view". In this way an Owenite Spirit Christology confirms the theological plausibility of the "instrument" view. It is theologically plausible that the Holy Spirit acted as the supreme sacerdotal instrument through which Christ offered himself to the Father.

¹⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 345.

Conclusion

In summary, it has been shown that the New Testament hapax *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in Hebrews 9:14 denotes the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that this phrase describes the Spirit's instrumental function as the applicator of "the blood" of the supreme offering of Christ. The grammatical juxtaposition of *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* in 9:14, with "sprinkling" (*ῥαντίζουσα*) in 9:13, suggests that the Holy Spirit acts as the "superior hyssop branch" through which Christ offers his sacrifice to God. Furthermore, *προσήνεγκεν* is employed to describe Christ's priestly "offering" in the heavenly Holy of Holies, which the author understood to be offered via a hyssop branch. And lastly, an Owenite Spirit Christology has shown this perspective to be theologically plausible. Therefore, the prepositional phrase *διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου* which modifies *προσήνεγκεν*, naturally describes the Holy Spirit as the sacerdotal "instrument" through which Christ presents the benefits of his self-sacrifice to the Father. Just as the Holy Spirit mystically and eternally "carries" and "applies" the benefits of Christ's self-sacrifice to his people via union with Christ, so also the Holy Spirit "carries" and "presents" the benefits of Christ's self-sacrifice to the Father in the greater tabernacle, that is, heaven.

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ABSTRACT

THE ETERNAL SPIRIT AS THE SUPERIOR HYSSOP IN HEBREWS 9:14

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What precisely does the author of Hebrews refer to when he states that [Χριστὸς]... διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ? It is the contention of this paper that the New Testament hapax διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου in Hebrews 9:14 denotes the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this phrase describes the Spirit's instrumental function as the applicator of the blood of Christ. The grammatical juxtaposition of διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου in 9:14, with "sprinkling" (ῥαντίζουσα) in 9:13, suggests that the Holy Spirit acts as the "superior hyssop branch" through which Christ offers his sacrifice to God. Furthermore, προσήνεγκεν is employed to describe Christ's priestly "offering" in the heavenly Holy of Holies, which the author understood to be offered via a hyssop branch. Therefore, the prepositional phrase διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου which modifies προσήνεγκεν, naturally describes the Holy Spirit as the sacerdotal "instrument" through which Christ presents the benefits of his self-sacrifice to the Father.

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